Borders workers may unionize

■ UFCW representatives planned to meet with employees of downtown Ann Arbor store today at Michigan League.

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NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Employees of the Borders Books & Music store in downtown Ann Arbor will meet today to consider forming a union, though organizers would not comment about why they want a third party to bargain with the company.

Representatives of United Food & Commercial Workers Union Local 876, headquartered in Madison Heights, were scheduled to talk with full- and part-time Borders employees at 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. today in the Henderson Room of the Michigan League, 911 N. University Ave.

According to a petition UFCW filed with the National Labor Relations Board on July 2, at least 30 percent of 71 nonmanagerial workers have signed cards authorizing the union to be their representative with Borders.

If OK'd by the NLRB, a vote by employees could come in August to decide whether the UFCW should represent employees at the Borders store at Liberty and Maynard streets, said Jerry Gordon, an organizing director for UFCW.

The UFCW needs a majority of eligible employees to vote in its favor to become recognized by the company as a third-party bargainer. Such a vote would only affect the downtown Ann Arbor store and not the other units in the 116-store Borders Book & Music chain, which is based in Ann Arbor.

Union spokesman Mark Charrette said the UFCW has told Borders that more than 50 percent of the nonmanagement employees have signed union cards. But the company has not recognized the union as a bargaining agent, so the UFCW is seeking an NLRB-sanctioned vote by employees.

The NLRB tentatively has set a July 16 hearing to determine which employees are eligible to vote in such an election, Charrette said. At that same hearing, Borders can air its concerns about the union.

"We recognize the right of employees to engage in union activities but don't feel unions are necessary," said Marilyn Slankard, spokeswoman for the company. "We always prefer to deal directly with employees in solving issues and don't feel third parties are necessary."

Employees of at least one other store have tried to organize. On March 27, employees of a Borders store in Philadelphia voted against joining the Industrial Workers of the World, a union headquartered in Ypsilanti.

A flier distributed by IWW representatives last week outside the Borders store in Ann Arbor alleges that in June, Philadelphia employee and union organizer Miriam Fried questioned check-cashing policies at the store and the company used it as a pretext to fire her.

That's disputed by Borders.

"This is not true," Slankard said. "The employee was not separated from employment for union activities."